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Message Text

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13
ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 SSO-00 ISO-00 /031 W
---------- 053368
P R 090710Z OCT 74
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 1667
AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 2257

STADIS//////////////////////////////////////

EXDIS

S/S-O FOR NEA, AND NEA/ARN ONLY

BEIRUT FOR AMBASSADOR AND RCAA DWOR

ABU DHABI FOR AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: EAIR, SY
SUBJ: CIVIL AVIATION: SYRIAN ARAB AIRLINES REEQUIPMENT

1. SYRIAN BUSINESSMAN ABDUL RAHMAN ATTAR CALLED ON ECONOFF OCT 7 PRIOR TO DEPARTING FOR 10 DAYS IN EUROPE AND STATED FOLLOWING:

A. SARG WILL TAKE NO DECISION ON WIDEBODIED AIRCRAFT PURCHASE (CURRENT COMPETITION BETWEEN LOCKHEED L-1011 AND FRENCH AIRBUS A-300 B4) AS SARG PRES. ASAD NOW CONVINCED SYRIA NOT YET READY FOR WIDEBODIED AIRCRAFT.

B. PRES ASAD HAD AIRCRAFT PROBLEMS ON OCTOBER 2-3 RETURN FROM NORTH WHEN HIS ILYUSHIN SUFFERED POWER FAILURE ON TWO ENGINES AND HAD TO LAND AT SIBERIAN AIRFIELD FOR FOUR-HOUR REPAIR JOB. THIS EXPERIENCE TURNED PRESIDENT'S THINKING TOWARD PROVEN, RELIABLE AIRCRAFT IN WORLDWIDE SERVICE OVER LONG PERIOD OF TIME.
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C. ACCORDING TO ATTAR, THIS AIRCRAFT SHOULD BE BOEING 727-200 TO HAVE SUFFICIENT RANGE AND ALSO BE SUITABLE FOR SAA CURRENT ARAB, EUROPEAN, AND INTERNATIONAL ROUTES. HE ADDED 707 NOT IN RUNNING BECAUSE OF NOISE PROBLEMS.

D. ATTAR ASKED IF EXIM BANK FINANCING MIGHT BE AVAILABLE FOR FOUR OR FIVE 727-200'S. ECONOFF REPLIED SUCH FINANCING WOULD HAVE TO BE CONSIDERED ONCE SARG/BOING DISCUSSIONS TAKE PLACE. (ATTAR WELL AWARE OF OUTSTANDING EXIM BANK CLAIM OF OVER $81,000 AGAINST SARG.)

E. ATTAR SAID NOT TO WORRY ABOUT MAHDI TAJIR'S POSITION, AS HE COULD BE TURNED TOWARD BOEING IF NECESSARY. ATTAR NOTED HE AND TAJIR HAD WORKED TOGETHER ON ABU DHABI GRANT FOR PURCHASE OF EMERGENCY GAS TURBINES FOR POWER GENERATION IN POST-OCTOBER 1973 REPAIR OF SYRIAN POWER FACILITIES. ATTAR IMPLIED ABU DHABI FINANCING TO SARG FOR 727'S MIGHT BE MADE AVAILABLE.

F. ATTAR ALSO SAID THAT UNDER NEWLY CREATED MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT, SARG AIRCRAFT SELECTION COMMITTEE WILL BE RECONSTITUTED WITH NEW MEMBERSHIP CONSISTING OF MORE TECHNICALLY ORIENTED GROUP THAT WOULD SEE ECONOMIC MERIT OF SAA UPGRADING FROM DETERIORATING CARAVELLE FLEET (FOUR) TO FIVE 727-200'S RATHER THAN JUMPING TO WIDE-BODIED AIRCRAFT.

2. COMMENT: HISTORY OF OUR COMMERCIAL EFFORTS VIS-A-VIS SAA RE-EQUIPMENT HAS ALWAYS BEEN TO PROMOTE THE SALE OF US-MADE AIRCRAFT WITHOUT PREJUDICE TO MANUFACTURER. WE THEREFORE BELIEVE BOUING/BEIRUT SHOULD BE MADE AWARE OF POSSIBLE SYRIAN INTEREST IN 727-200'S AND LET BOEING TAKE IT FROM THERE WITHOUT INVOLVING OURSELVES IN WHOM BOEING HAS USED OR MAY WANT TO HIRE TO PROMOTE ITS INTERESTS IN SYRIA. NOR SHOULD WE PROVIDE BOEING WITH ATTAR'S PITCH DESCRIBED ABOVE. THIS SHOULD BE ON ATTAR'S INITIATIVE VIS-A-VIS BOEING.

3. AS ANYONE INVOLVED IN AIRCRAFT SALES IS SWARE, INS AND OUTS OF THESE DEALS CAN BE COMPLICATED, TO SAY THE LEAST. WE ARE TOO NEW HERE TO COMMENT ON ATTAR'S APPROACH WHICH HE BASES LARGELY ON ECONOMIC ARGUMENTS MATCHING SAA'S PRESENT REQUIRE-
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MENTS AND 727-200 CAPABILITIES. ATTAR IS AGGRESSIVE, YOUNG AND APPARENTLY WELL-CONNECTED BUSINESSMAN, VICE PRESIDENT OF SARG FOREIGN TRADE COMMITTEE, ACTIVE MEMBER OF DAMASCUS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, AND AGENT FOR GENERAL TELEPHONE - USA, THOMSON CSF/FRANCE, FIAT, ALITALIA, AND IS ATTEMPTING ARRANGE $1 TO $2 MILLION TELECOMM DEAL FOR MOTOROLA.

4. WE REALIZE REKINDLINE BOEING'S INTEREST IN SAA COULD

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COMPLICATE LOCKHEED'S CURRENT EFFORTS, BUT WE AGREE WITH RCAA/ BEIRUT THAT USG SHOULD PROMOTE ALL US TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT (BEIRUT 8193) JULY 16).

5. ACTION REQUESTED:

A. RCAA/ BEIRUT INFORM BOEING/BEIRUT OF POSSIBLE REINTEREST OF SYRIANS IN 727-200 BECAUSE OF REPORTED BACKING OFF FROM DECISION ON WIDE-BODIED AIRCRAFT. MAY ALSO NOTE REPORTED POSSIBLE RECONSTITUTION OF SARG AIRCRAFT SELECTION COMMITTEE.

B. RCAA/BEIRUT INFORM LOCKHEED/BEIRUT OF REPORTED DELAY ON WIDE-BODIED AIRCRAFT DECISION, REPORTED ATTITUDE OF PRES. ASAD THAT SYRIA NOT YET READY FOR SUCH AIRCRAFT, AND THAT PRESENT AIRCRAFT SELECTION COMMITTEE MAY BE RECONSTITUTED UNDER NEWLY CREATED MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT.
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